

[The Arizona Republic](#)

Dianne M. Naney

On the same day that U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell toured the ongoing air-quality renovations at Corona del Sol High, junior Erika Hatch was dealing with headaches and breathing difficulties.

"I just wish they'd fix our school," said Hatch, a 16-year-old Corona student, who said she is tired of dealing with construction and health worries.

Tempe Union High School District officials have acknowledged that headaches, lethargy and respiratory problems can be side effects of elevated carbon-dioxide levels, which in some areas of Corona exceed state standards.

The Arizona Democrat said Thursday that the health of teachers, staff and students was the primary reason he chose to visit Corona and has pushed for a federal bill that would allow schools that do not meet state or local health standards to apply for building or renovation grants.

"As a former teacher . . . (and) as a parent, you always want students to be taught in a safe environment," he said.

Mitchell said he hoped to see House Resolution 3021 - the 21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act, which passed the House and awaits a Senate vote - offer relief to schools like Corona that are in need of repairs but are struggling to pay for costly renovations.

Superintendent Steve Adolph said he welcomed Mitchell's support. "He introduced a bill that we will definitely jump onboard to apply for if it passes," he said.

The tour was a homecoming of sorts for the former Tempe Union teacher turned politician. Along the way, Mitchell hugged former students and colleagues. He was joined by Tempe Union administration and two school-board members. Jack Hoffman, Corona's original architect and current renovations project manager, answered Mitchell's many questions.

Mitchell asked about leaking pipes in outdoor walkways and was told all old piping would eventually be replaced. He asked about mold and was told that some mold was found but it was being cleaned and removed.

Wet ceiling tiles, if left to stand, he was told, "would be a health problem," but that maintenance was removing water-stained tiles on a daily basis.

Hoffman told Mitchell the district expected to see its temporary fix improve carbon-dioxide levels, but it did not expect those levels to fall below state standards. The Arizona Department of Health Services is currently testing for carbon dioxide and expects those results sometime in the next month.

Mitchell asked when the project would be done and was told the permanent fix would require new air handlers in each classroom, and that while some rooms would be finished in the coming months, it would be about a year before the ventilation system was completely renovated.

And while during that time Corona would have to deal with heat and humidity, he said those who do not suffer from respiratory conditions would not be at any health risk.

Mitchell said he supported the district and staff efforts, but he also said that if environmental testing shows health risks, he expects the district to remove students from that environment.